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The LEGO Brick

A Re-construction of a Contemporary Culture

It is extremely difficult to choose a symbol of contemporary culture, since contemporary man is surrounded by symbols. Analyzing the modern societies of Western Europe and USA, we can observe a peculiar explosion of things, ideas, words and even people have become symbols of something. An old concept of Ernst Cassirer, *animal symbolicum*¹ can be slowly changed into *animal symbolicum symbolicum*, which means that the process of using symbols is intensified nowadays. Among the reasons for such an observation we can enumerate the following: the process of globalization, the initiative of an information society, the deepening mutual interdependence between societies, the popularization of highly developed technologies of communication and a fast lifestyle. Globalization was a consequence of the end of the Cold War international order and the liberalization of international trade, which has caused high pressure on interpersonal communication. This process made it easier to create and spread new ideas, attitudes or words, among which were to be future symbols.

An information society, popularized by Manuel Castells as “the Network Society”, means a kind of society that is interconnected by the use of the innovative technologies of mass communication. The initiation of this trend can be observed from the beginning of 1980s, but it was to become fully developed from the end of the Cold War. It led to a new phenomenon: the almost fully realized ideal of an extremely open societal world, where the level of the circulation of information went beyond all expectations. Technology and change within the international order created new possibilities for the sharing of ideas and interests. Thirdly, the process of

¹ E. Cassirer, *An Essay on Man. An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human*, Yale 1944, p. 44.

deepening complex interdependencies led to a situation in which a country's desire to be self-sufficient economically and politically became an anachronism. It did not allow it to achieve the advantages of a free market and a liberalization in the free flow of goods, services and workers.

All the factors mentioned above made the process of the popularization of new symbols easier and their circulation more dynamic, so they ceased to be the property of only one culture. Also, the decreasing price of Internet technologies and the increase of access to multimedia led to a possibility for the users themselves to become symbols themselves. This is exemplified by people recording and popularizing on YouTube their battle with cancer or other terminal illnesses. The last factor – the increasingly rapid lifestyles of people nowadays, the pressure for innovations, quickening data transmission and the production of goods and services has also quickened the “cycle of life” of a symbol, which has become a product subordinated to the strict laws of the market. For the purpose of the essay, culture is understood as a complicated and dynamic system consisting of artifacts, traditions, customs and values combined in a specific way. Through the adjective “contemporary” I refer to the features and tendencies in culture observed after World War II, especially those during the last decade.

For these reasons, the choice of a single symbol of contemporary culture appears a challenge. In my opinion, a thing which would be such a symbol, should have the following features: simplicity of structure, its nature must reflect the main features of present-day society, it should be recognizable for people who go beyond the main group of its users and should be something prone to the building of broad generalizations on its basis. I feel that such attributes characterize the LEGO brick.

The LEGO Group. The meaning of the background

The LEGO Company was established by a Danish carpenter, Ole Kirk Christiansen in 1932. Initially, the bricks were wooden and were produced, as was common at that time, from the leftovers of wood used in furniture production. The name “LEGO” was an abbreviation of the Danish words: “leg godt,” which means “play well.”² It is worth pointing out that the idea for a small children's brick that inspired the LEGO producers had been invented by the British producers of the line of Kiddicraft Self-Locking Building Bricks.³ Over the subsequent years, Ole Christiansen's son developed a new product, partly by the introduction of plastic as the main material the bricks were made of, and slightly through a changed size, one probably better fit to a child's hand. In 1958 LEGO bricks received their characteristic form, which is recognized all over the world and is characterized by a possibility of perfectly

² T.F. Mortensen, *LEGO History Timeline*, 2012, material published by the LEGO Group at [on line] http://aboutus.lego.com/en-us/lego-group/the_lego_history, March 15, 2014.

³ M. Lauwaert, *Place of Play. Toys and Digital Cultures*, Amsterdam 2009, pp. 50-51.

matching one brick to another. Meanwhile, the LEGO Group broadened the range of its products, opened other divisions in European countries, in the Americas, Asia and even Africa and took on thousands of new employees, the company having originally started with 10 people in 1932. Now, the majority of Western middle-class children have at least one LEGO Duplo, LEGO System or LEGO Technic toy, and the LEGO Group is one of the most dynamic and income-generating corporations in the world.⁴

This information would not be so important for the purposes of this essay, if it did not have some significance. I think the history and strategy of LEGO's management board mirrors many features of modern culture and explains why the LEGO brick was to become chosen by me as "a symbol of contemporary culture." Just let's try to understand this subtle change in the production process, which was the transition from wooden to plastic bricks. This shift was highly controversial because of the meaning connected with the use of a material which for many people is a synonym of artificiality as opposed to natural and safe wood. Umberto Eco expressed it saying that material codes bring some meaning. A fundamental critique of plastic was formulated by Roland Barthes:

Current toys are made of graceless material, the product of chemistry, not of nature. Many are now moulded from complicated mixtures; the plastic material of which they are made has an appearance at once gross and hygienic, it destroys all the pleasure, the sweetness, the humanity of touch.⁵

The way of thinking among LEGO producers seemed to reveal a very profound truth that wood as a material was a part of an epoch in the history of culture, that had passed away: an epoch of hand-made things with all their imperfections that left plenty of space for children's imagination. Plastic bricks completely changed the situation. Instead of a toy, LEGO gave children a tool which was used to create toys such as buildings, palaces or cars. This crucial difference was perfectly caught by Maaïke Lauwaert:

The evolution from wooden building blocks to plastic designing bricks changed the way children could play with LEGO toys. Wooden building blocks allow you to make mainly abstract and architectural constructions that are not too high, do not have many corners, no sloping roof and are mainly two-dimensional. Plastic bricks that fit onto and into one another allow for more design and construction versatility.⁶

This process followed fundamental changes in Western culture after World War II. Together with the global liberalization of trade and the deepening interdependencies between countries within two political blocs there arose a pressure for an economic effectiveness differently understood, innovations and a fast pace of production, quite often at the expense of the natural environment. After World War II small producers

⁴ The LEGO Group, *A short presentation*, 2011, p. 5.

⁵ R. Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. A. Lavers, New York 1991, p. 54.

⁶ M. Lauwaert, op. cit., p. 53.

disappeared and the human hand was replaced by complicated machines which deepened the observable regime of the free market in Western countries. Such a trend was followed by changes within the culture system connected with the developing of so-called “mass culture,” which became the realm of flowing ideas, inspirations and symbols. The history of the LEGO Group mirrored these tendencies and created a product which anticipated Manuel Castells’ “project identity,”⁷ by giving children a useful tool to project and express their identities.

The net structure of LEGO’s divisions also mirrors important features of present-day management. LEGO has its agencies all over the world and work between them and the main headquarters is fully in tune with innovative technologies and IT connections. The Board of LEGO includes a group of people, chosen because of their competences⁸. There is also a family element: the owner of LEGO is a grandson of Ole Kristiansen, the inventor of LEGO. All of these elements mirror other features observable today: the pressure for competences, democracy and tradition passed from one generation to another.

The next element whereby the history of LEGO bricks strengthens its potential to be a symbol of contemporary culture is the long-term policy of the company concentrating on a gradual differentiating in the LEGO brick series. For example, in 1969 the LEGO producers created new bricks designed for infants, called DUPLO,⁹ in 1977 the LEGO Technic bricks came into being¹⁰ and in 1997 the LEGO SCALA series for girls was launched.¹¹ Apart from the fact that the bricks were easy to combine and perfectly fitted a child’s hand, they were also consistent with children’s age, gender, interests, lifestyles and even the countries they come from. This question will be developed in the next chapter, but now we can observe that the LEGO bricks were not only a product, but also an expression of multiculturalism in a globalizing world full of different nations, ethnicities, languages and religions. At the end of the century, almost every child could find something that metaphorically answered their needs. We can enumerate lots of other examples of the thesis that the history of LEGO bricks is strongly connected with the history of modern culture after World War II, but the purpose of the essay limits us to the latter. The LEGO Group development mirrored the process of the changing attitude toward children in modern society. After such events like the abolition of child labour, the rise of the world child protection movement and the rise of a global middle class, a child became a subject and childhood, in the common awareness, gained the status of some kind of “paradise lost.” Of course, in 19th century, the young heirs to a family

⁷ M. Castells, *The Power of Identity*, Blackwell 2010, p. 55.

⁸ M. Hatch, M. Jo Schultz, W. Olins, *Taking Brand Initiative. How Companies Can Align Strategy, Culture, and Identity Through Corporate Branding*, Hoboken 2008, p. 181.

⁹ T.F. Mortensen, op. cit., [on line] http://aboutus.lego.com/en-us/lego-group/the_lego_history/1960, March 17, 2014.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

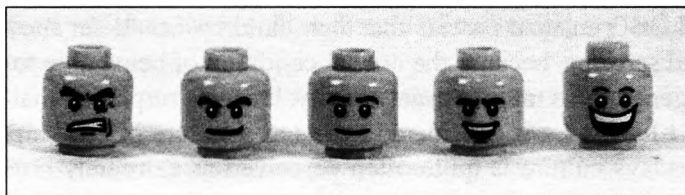
¹¹ Ibidem.

fortune had a lot of time to play with each other and be bored with hundreds of toys, but this was the privilege of an elite, especially white elites. After the fall of the great colonial empires, the change in societies' structure towards the ideal of a classless and differentiated "melting pot" and the brand new idea of leisure time, childhood ceased to be the right of the privileged. At the same time childhood became an object of political concern and legal protection in many countries in the world, even those under the influence of the USSR. LEGO followed these trends, building an economic empire on the newly born needs of masses of children, being an effect of post-war population growth. The company created a product which was strongly consistent with a child's perception, helped with improving their abstract thinking, gave them unlimited possibilities of developing their own talents and creativity and was a proper answer to a culture-based need to play. After an analysis of these examples, I would argue that the history and economic strategy of the LEGO Group somehow prepared its main product to become a symbol of contemporary culture. Now it is high time to develop and broaden this concept.

The LEGO brick as a symbol of contemporary culture. Characteristic features

LEGO – a "multisensual" toy not only for children

Analyzing the appearance of the LEGO bricks, it turns out that they have so many features and engage so many senses, that we could create a specific "semiotics of the LEGO brick." Firstly, the bricks appeal to vision: the number of colours used in their production is unimaginable, something which children appreciate as clever observers of the world around them. But apart from the brick, there is also the popular LEGO figure, whose faces display an increasing multiplicity of emotions as well as the phenomenon of emoticons, used by almost every means of communication nowadays. The picture below illustrates the point:



1. Faces of LEGO minifigures.

Source: [on line] <https://www.minnpost.com/second-opinion/2013/06/lego-faces-getting-angrier-impact-childrens-play-unclear>, November 23, 2015

I venture the thesis that the LEGO figures follow changes on the ground of communication observable in contemporary culture and the trend of using little pictures of faces consisting of dots, commas and colons, giving some new meaning to the message sent. The tendency was captured in the frames of human disciplines and termed an “iconic turn”, which characterizes three possible connections between text and image: “1) Images take priority over words; 2) Images (in themselves) are not unambiguous; 3) Images and words are in interaction, they have the same level of importance”.¹² The examples of such connections can be nowadays observed with amazing frequency, especially when virtual communication is taken into account. From that point of view, the LEGO figures and their emotional faces are directly expressing a contemporary mode of contacting one another. Secondly, the LEGO bricks are very strongly connected with the sense of touch: their walls are perfectly smooth and straight, a pleasing tactile sensation. What is more important, the texture of the bricks indicates a specific dualism which is somehow similar to that observed during the reconstructing of a culture system. Although one brick is a simple piece of plastic, combining it with other bricks means that we can build things that are very complicated, rough and full of different curvatures. The same can be observed within the culture system: every element such as an artifact, a word, a gesture or a custom is a relatively simple and internally integrated part of a bigger entity and, considered individually, does not have any meaning. It gains a meaning, however, this element acquires a growing importance and deeper meaning in the broader context of cultural surroundings. There would not have been any fun if a child had had only one brick to play with. Thus the texture of the LEGO brick shows a crucial feature of contemporary culture, which is the deepening and broadening relations between the basic units of cultural systems. Nowadays, units do not belong to only one system, but can interact by processes of borrowing and diffusion. This illustrates the fact that we can simply combine a brick from the LEGO System and a brick from LEGO Technic, similarly as the combining of being Jewish with speaking English in the USA or the United Kingdom.

Thirdly, the LEGO bricks affect the sense of hearing by... almost not affecting it. The paradox will be easy to understand, if we look at one of ten characteristics of the LEGO brick, indicated by Godfred Kirk Christiansen in 1963, which was *Healthy, quiet play*.¹³ LEGO ensured parents that their children would get a toy which limits their yells and screams, because the crucial condition of being able to play is thinking¹⁴, which generally is rather a quiet activity. It seems surprising that the silence of playing with LEGO toys is considered by me as a feature of contemporary culture, because nowadays culture is quite often perceived as extremely noisy, especially,

¹² Á. Veszelszki, “Connections of Image and Text in Digital and Handwritten Documents”, [in:] A. Benedek, K. Nyíri, *Iconic Turn in Education. Visual Learning*, vol. 2, 2012, p. 99.

¹³ T.F. Mortensen, op. cit.

¹⁴ Ch. Vallaster, C. Fisher, *Connective Branding. Building Brand Equity in a Demanding World*, Hoboken 2010, p. 114.

when we take into account the sounds of big cities such as modern music, irritating ringtones, cars engines or horns. That's why more and more people are now looking for peace and quiet, migrating from the city centre to the suburbs. This trend also explains why the European Commission created a Common Initiative called JESSICA (Joint European Support for Sustainable Investment in City Areas) which supports small and big projects regenerating large city districts, renewing green areas and constructing quiet and peaceful places in order to improve the quality of life in urban areas.¹⁵ The idea of living close to nature, far from

turmoil is becoming gradually more popular and was appreciated also by the producers of drugs who increasingly often encourage us to buy their products based on "only natural ingredients" and by travel agencies which offer us "desired holidays" through "getting back to nature". The need for silence is evident also within the media. In such a context, LEGO's idea of "quiet play" seemed to anticipate tendencies that characterize the life of big cities. The last senses – smell and taste – seem not to be such important features of toys, especially bricks, but we can even distinguish some traces of them. For example, some kind of bricks are characterized by such a high level of precision that we can feel hungry, looking at the plastic and moulded fruit illustrated in the picture 2, an unpleasant feeling is elicited.

This is another feature of contemporary culture, precisely – an element of its system which is the colourful, appetizing and controversial world of advertisements, which very often combine to influence the different senses of recipients. For example, by catching their eye they try to cause a feeling of hunger (McDonald's), by the use of appropriate words to make recipients imagine some vision (radio advertisements) or by using all the possible senses to show the uniqueness of a perfume (Armani, Dior or Klein). Summing up, LEGO bricks characterize the feature of the "multisensuality" that is affecting all one's senses or affecting one of them in order to affect another, which is, above all, a feature of contemporary culture as it is understood by me.



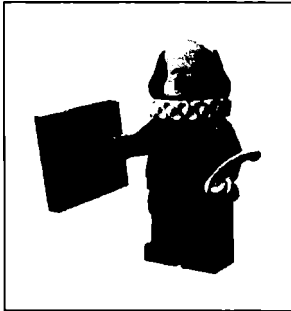
2. The LEGO fruit.

Source: [on line] <http://uedata.amazon.com/LEGO-Fruit-Cherries-Bananas-Apples/dp/B007C7VPKS>, November 21, 2015

¹⁵ "Regional Policy. Inforegio", document of the European Commission. Available [on line] http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/thefunds/instruments/jessica_en.cfm#1, March 15, 2014. Some examples of how JESSICA worked in Poland can be found at [on line] http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/thefunds/instruments/jessica_evaluations_en.cfm#16, March 15, 2014.

LEGO – a multicultural form of play for everyone

The second important feature of LEGO bricks that indicates their relations with present-day systems of culture is their mirroring of a multicultural world, full of different ethnicities, languages, religions and values combined in a specific unity. Let's analyze a couple of examples. The first of them will be the presence of bricks referring to the cultural heritage of every civilization. There are, for instance, figures that look like Shakespeare, Poe or Twain, as illustrated below.



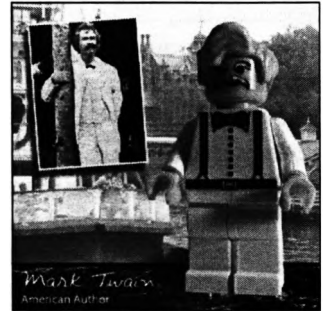
3. William Shakespeare.

Source: [on line] http://lego.wikia.com/wiki/William_Shakespeare, November 15, 2015



4. Edgar Allan Poe.

Source: [on line] <http://booklips.pl/galeria/slawni-pisarze-jako-figurki-lego>, November 15, 2015



5. Mark Twain.

Source: [on line] <http://flavorwire.com/151710/our-favorite-writers-as-legos>, November 15, 2015

Thus, we can say that even as simple a toy as LEGO bricks preserves a collective memory which constructs our differentiated identities and is formed by shape of the cultures which we come from. In this context the bricks extend beyond the stable borders between the world of fun and world of seriousness; and this is another feature of contemporary culture where people can learn by playing and serious events can be expressed by a sense of humour. Even contemporary studies on fun as a cultural phenomenon, treating fun as an object of serious consideration,¹⁶ confirm this observation. Secondly, LEGO shows a real variety of cultural artifacts belonging to different cultures, among which we can enumerate for example: architecture, dress and traditions.

Thanks to such differentiation, children are taught that the world around them is colourful and that the cultural borders of their system of culture are not the borders of culture in general. This shows that LEGO is not only a product of Western culture, but also mirrors other cultural points of view, just as is the case within contemporary culture, which consists of many traditions and lifestyles. Thirdly, the bricks help to

¹⁶ For further information I recommend: *Culture of Fun*, R. Kantor, M. Banaszkiewicz, T. Paleczny (eds.), Cracow 2012; or J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens. Fun as a Source of Culture*, Warsaw 1967.

express the religious heritage of many cultures, which is a serious contribution to studies on interreligious relations.



6. The LEGO Japan minifigure.

Source: [on line] <http://jesterghoblin.com/?p=87>
71, November 25, 2015



7. The LEGO Taj Mahal.

Source: [on line] <http://shop.lego.com/en-US/Taj-Mahal-10189>, November 30, 2015



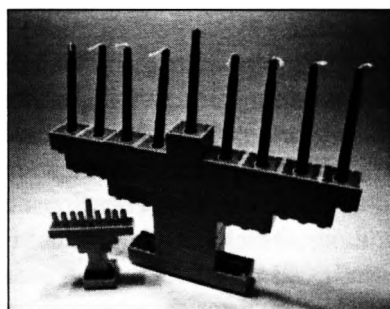
8. The Gypsy Fortune Teller.

Source: [on line] <http://www.amazon.com/71000-Series-Minifigure-Fortune-Teller/dp/B00AWJ93SY>, November 28, 2015



9. A muslim believer¹⁷.

Source: [on line] <http://www.cairoscene.com/Buzz/EDL-Legoland-for-Whites-Only>, November 25, 2015



10. A Jewish candlestick for Hanukkah.

Source: <http://lego.gizmodo.com/5966621/add-lego-to-your-photos-get-huge-lego-sets-for-free>, November 15, 2015

There also exist a series with religious prophets and controversially – with Muslim terrorists. It is not a secret that these are strong generalizations, but we must remember that revealing the Truth is not the aim of LEGO, nor any other toy. Instead, producers try to show some chosen aspects of relations between religions, but without seriously offending any faith, because we should bear in mind that LEGO

¹⁷ The series with Mohammed was not made by LEGO producers, but its idea poses a question about the presence of falsification of some cultural representations, especially, within the Internet.

has also many branches in the Middle East and Far East, so it would be economically unreasonable to express only a Western point of view. Moreover, we should point out that all the figures have got perfectly the same bodies, hands and legs. The main difference lies in their heads, which is also similar to theses on the representatives of human disciplines: we are the same species and thus we are a unity, but the main differences lie in our perception of the world around us and thus, we compose an infinite variety. There is another aspect to that. The LEGO producers, inventing such series of bricks, immediately join the crucial debate for international studies as to the role of religion in contemporary culture. Currently we can observe challenges to secularization theses and the idea of atheism being the main trend within modern societies, which has turned out to be limited only to Western countries. In other regions we have a return to religion as an element which expresses not only the faith, but also the cultural heritage, for example, among Muslims. Thus, the bricks should be perceived as a product which keeps up with intercultural debates. Summing up, the LEGO bricks show a variety of cultures and some aspects of the relations between them, which is another factor positioning it to be a symbol of contemporary culture.

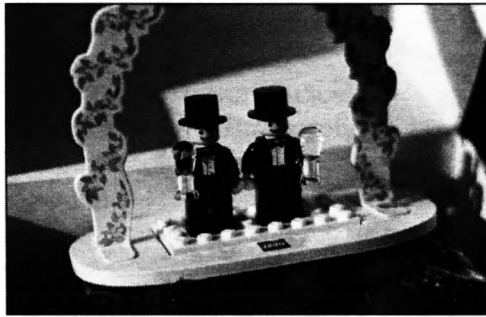
LEGO – appreciation of minorities

It seems to be quite interesting that LEGO toys are used to appreciate people belonging to groups perceived as minorities. The presence of them in toys, which are such an important factor in the shaping of children's cultural identities, means that although its members are still underprivileged, they are becoming an element of public debates and general consciousness. This inclusion is also a feature of contemporary culture, which tries to give the underprivileged the right to speak out, which can be illustrated by the increasing number of inquiries into so-called "oral history", showing history from the viewpoint of those who lost the battle for proper representation within society and the right to speak out. It is worth adding that this phenomenon has been a key concept within humanities for more than 30 years (so called *memory boom*¹⁸, including peripheral memories).

This new turn in the field of humanities is radically different from the shape of 18th and 19th century discourse which, which let in the paradigm of evolutionism, ignored large groups of people who did not fit into the system, made a complicated system of taboos and tried to expel them from society by the means of penitentiary and medical systems, something widely described by Michel Foucault. Contemporary culture has markedly changed that rhetoric: now, being a part of the group of Others is widely perceived as an advantage and a chance to express somebody's uniqueness though without isolationist tendencies. The visible example of that is a presence of Roma among the LEGO minifigures among, significantly, the bricks of LEGO

¹⁸ E. Boesen, "Peripheral Memories – Introduction", [in:] *Peripheral Memories. Public and Private Forms of Experiencing and Narrating the Past*, Bielefeld 2012, p. 7.

System. This is a simple realization of the postulate of an open society to include the representatives of different national and ethnic groups within the society. The same can be said about the presence of sexual minorities that are slowly taking their place within the discourse, advancing the principle of non-discrimination.



11. The Gay Pride House. LEGO is able to create occasional minifigures, such as those on a wedding cake of a homosexual pair.

Source: [on line] <http://www.visitcopenhagen.com/copenhagen/russian-fairy-tale-denmark>. November 28, 2015

LEGO bricks seem to join these debates by showing groups of minorities within a system framework as indispensable factors of a contemporary society and a condition of openness and tolerance. But the reality is never so easy and simple, so we can also find examples of using the bricks to express violence towards these groups, which shows that LEGO gains its meaning dependent on the context. Official series like “Gay Pride” in a way similar to the official policy of the French or American governments can only create conditions and a system of encouragement in order to create an area for cross-cultural meetings. However, this recognition and encouragement does not mean that there will not be possibilities and attempts at changing it, which is significantly shown by the LEGO constructions of people who believe in only one pattern of lifestyle.

LEGO – a construction of a re-constructed world

Besides all the above features, there is a fundamental thing that predicts, perhaps predestines, LEGO bricks to be a symbol of contemporary culture; and this is connected with the nature of them. The main use of bricks is building, which supports a constructivist paradigm which states that political, like a social reality, is almost fully constructed by us through the process of socialization on the one hand, and our creativity on the other. The culture in which we were born gives us only an axiological framework and the possibilities of acting, beyond which starts another system of culture. But our obligation is to form our lifestyle from multifarious pieces.

This is exactly like the LEGO bricks, which are a great accumulation of little plastic things having different shapes and colours but which gain meaning only through the constructions which they comprise. The same with cultural practices and the artifacts which build that complicated entirety – our culture.¹⁹



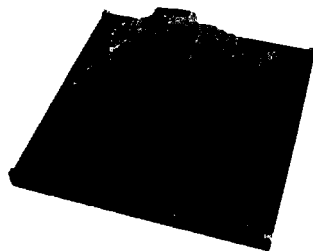
12. An Ancient Greek Temple.

Source: [on line] <https://ideas.lego.com/projects/37578>, November 15, 2015



13. The Eiffel's Tower.

Source: [on line] <http://shop.lego.com/en-US/The-Eiffel-Tower-cr-21019>, November 30, 2015



14. The Ancient Zikkurat.

Source: [on line] <http://www.moc-pages.com/moc.php/326354>, November 23, 2015

The bricks allow us also to create an unimaginable number of constructions, which is similar to mentally constructing our identities and place within the social structure. The present-day world lets us choose among an incredible variety of values, beliefs, points of view and lifestyles. This possibility, which was not so widely known until the end of World War II, is a crucial determinant of contemporary culture. This social constructivism also has negative aspects. Such diversity can cause big problems with identification and as a result – a painful feeling of being lost and indecisive – a condition also mirrored by LEGO, the playing with which proves an occasion to build wonderful buildings and also constructions showing the destabilization of a subject. In this interpretation, man is deconstructed, dissolved, disassembled, unable to act and consisting of little elements which make the entirety unstable, a concept of the relatively new and dynamic postmodernist paradigm, represented among almost all the disciplines of the humanities. Looking at the art of Nathan Sawaya, who makes his sculptures out of LEGO bricks, we can observe a strong, postmodernist potential expressed in the presence of a weak, internally torn and sad subject, which is an effect of contemporary culture.

Thus, it seems that LEGO bricks are a catchy metaphor of present-day reality, especially within culture, mainly because of the dual meaning which they bring. On the one hand, they are a synonym of an interlocking mechanism, cohesion and internal harmony, but on the other – they are a metaphor of instability, fragmentation and dynamic change, because every construction will have its end, when the game is

¹⁹ B. Comber, T. Cremin, K. Hall, *International Handbook of Research on Children's Literacy. Learning and Culture*, Somerset 2013, p. 96.

over. And all the rest will become only an aggregation of little plastic pieces without their own meaning until the next playtime or, the next stadium in the historical process of cultural evolution. LEGO shows this problem in an excellent way.

Critique. Summary

I am sure that a model of LEGO bricks mirroring the main tendencies of contemporary culture will result in some critical voices. Three problems are of the biggest concern. Firstly, LEGO bricks are the artifacts of Western culture, and many children in the world have not even touched the toy. So, can LEGO be a symbol of contemporary culture, understood in a holistic way? The answer is still “yes”, since we do not have to be a part of some culture in order to understand the meaning of a symbol. For instance, Christians recognize the Star of David as a symbol of Judaism, although they are not members of Jewish culture. Similarly, LEGO can still be used as a symbol of contemporary culture, although not everyone has contact with the toy. Secondly, there are problems with the legitimacy of such a symbol. If the majority of the world consists of poor countries which cannot afford to build a LEGO factory, what will be the mandate of the bricks as a symbol then? I can venture the thesis that the symbolism of LEGO lies not in its popularity, but in it being a proper metaphor of (post)modern tendencies. This is the essence of science: models and theories do not gain the status of paradigms simply because of the power of their inventors, but, above all, by a proper grasping of the basic relations between the objects of analysis. Although they need the acceptance of a wide group of researchers to be in force, this utility should be achieved by them being close to scientific truth. The same is with LEGO bricks: if the model includes the main features of reality and grasps the relations between them accurately, then it will gradually achieve acceptance, no matter how many people do not know the toy. Thirdly, taking for granted that the toy is a symbol, somebody can deduce that all social reality becomes the focus of fun; however, every day is full of tragic and serious issues of great importance. This is a serious mistake of such a generalization since, as we have seen, the bricks are used not only by children, but also by adults and not only for fun. Moreover, nowadays we can observe the tendency of accepting theories of performance, treating the social world as a complicated thicket of communication games and theatrical performances of everyday life. Thus, perceiving LEGO as an element of defining social interactions and everyday communication games seems to legitimize it as a symbol of present-day tendencies within culture. Summing up, I can say that LEGO as a symbol becomes



15. Sculptures of Nathan Sawaya.

Source: [on line] http://www.planetdiecast.com/index.php?option=com_kunena&func=view&catid=84&id=78644&Itemid=18, November 23, 2015

a chance for anthropologists and students of culture studies to better describe the modern world and the changes present within it, which, I hope, has been proven in this essay.